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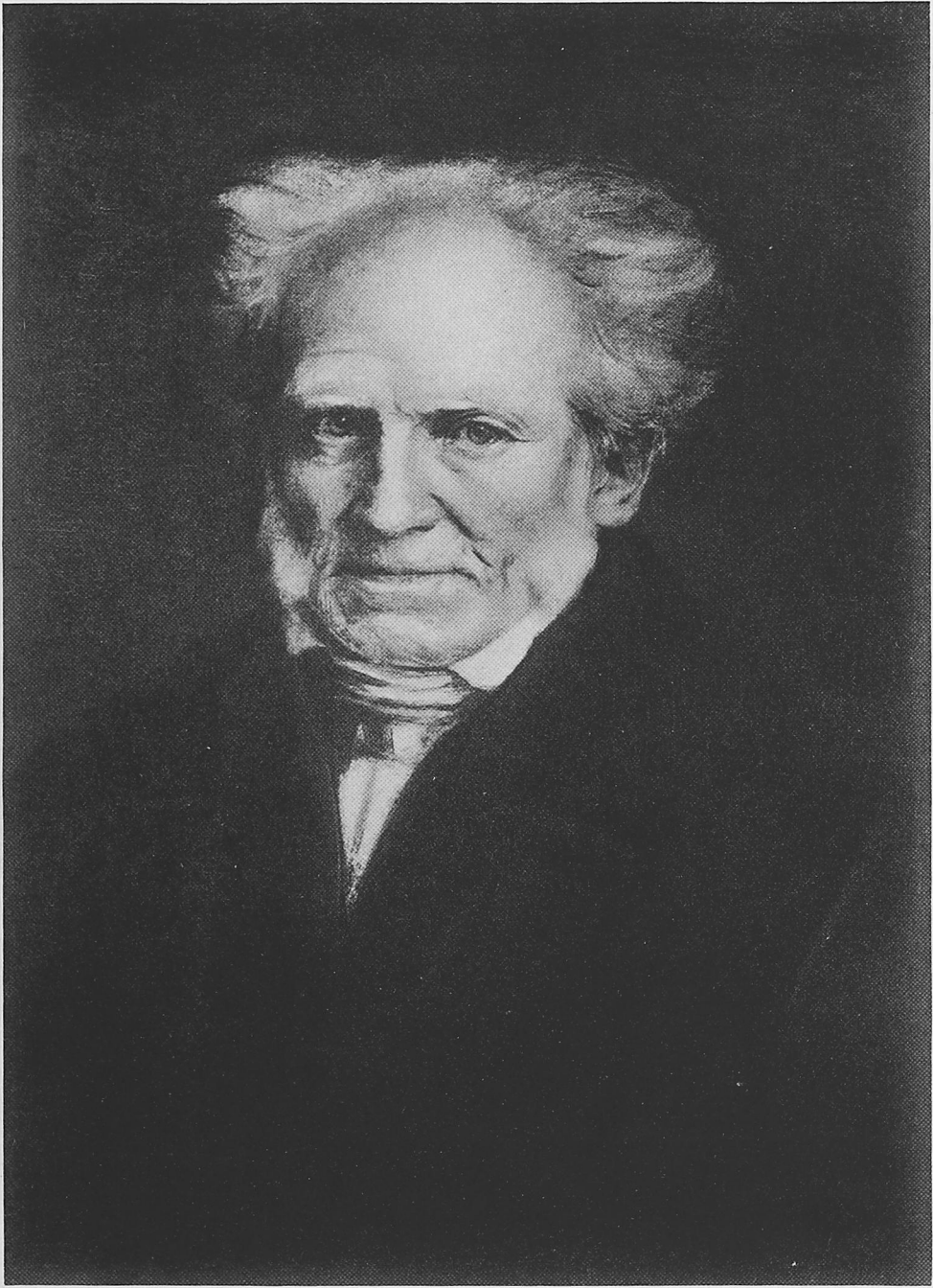
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Arthur Schopenhauer
From a painting by E. von Lenbach
Original in Hause Wahnfried Bayreuth

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

I.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER was born on the 22nd of February, 1788, at Dantzig. His father, Heinrich Schopenhauer, was a prosperous man of business, who had married Johanna Trosienier, afterwards a member of the "Intelligence" that surrounded Goethe at Weimar. When Prussia annexed the free city of Dantzig, Heinrich Schopenhauer moved with his family to Hamburg, and there commenced the education of the future philosopher. When sixteen years of age, Arthur spent nine months in England, studying the language. His father died, and the widow flitted to Weimar, leaving the boy to his own devices. Mother and son could not hit it off together. She recognized genius, but complained that the ill-humour and egoism of Arthur were unbearable. Arthur for his part admitted that his mother was a woman with brains; but it was his father whom he admired, and he used to say: "A man inherits his intellect from the mother and his character from the father." The old merchant had provided for his family; that in itself assured him an eternal honour. For, as Schopenhauer explained in the dedicatory preface to "The World as Will and Representation": "I owe it to you, my father, that I can live in the service of truth without becoming its martyr. If I have been able to follow my native bent towards study, meditation . . . if my frugality . . . assured me at least such liberty that I could say each day on awakening, 'This day is mine' . . . if I did not succumb to the temptation to lower philosophy to serve as an instrument for

the interests of the vulgar—all that, things so many and so great, I owe to you, my never-to-be-forgotten father."

II.

Schopenhauer's doctrine stands out in strange contrast to his character; his character itself had no contradictory features. He was like some English misanthrope out of Dickens, except that his pursuit was not material gain, but the consolations of philosophy; an egoistic, hard-bitten man, he was indifferent to friendship, tirelessly industrious, a miser—he doubled the little fortune that his father had left him—impervious to sentiment. Also he was subject, as his mother complained, to terrible fits of ill-humour, and once he threw a seamstress downstairs because she had annoyed him with her chatter; the matter went to the Berlin law courts and he was obliged to pay an annuity to the victim. He thought it unjust, and when the poor woman died twenty years later, he exclaimed *Obit anus, abit onus* (the hag is dead, the charge is discharged). After middle age he became slightly more amiable, and young girls of intelligence could touch him on the side of his vanity. Very characteristic of an old grumbler was his care for the health. He had counted on living to a hundred; but he died at the age of seventy-two—in the words of a recent biographer—"much to his surprise, if so one may express it."

III.

Man's sin lies in his being born; all the rest is pre-determined—that is the fan-

tastic starting-point of Schopenhauer's philosophy. It is for some people a rather jolly philosophy, and books have been written on the optimism of Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche, his successor, who tried to reverse his philosophy by attacking the morality of Pity, proclaiming the will to live, and exalting the warrior over the saint, led by a seeming paradox a much less happy life. Schopenhauer, solitary and self-sufficient, founded a "system" in which pity stands above all other qualities; conversely Nietzsche, an engaging and sensitive personality, exclaims: "I am to that extent compassionate that I make of my hardness my virtue and my god." Both men had a long struggle for recognition; but Schopenhauer's confidence in the triumph of his thought never failed; he was not less sure than that great poet Coventry Patmore (to whom he presents some curious resemblances, both in his character and ideas) that—

"the lie shall rot—

The truth is great, and will prevail
When none care whether it prevail or
not."

IV.

Schopenhauer's dislike of the Germans is often quoted nowadays. "I am ashamed to have been born a German." The father whom he admired so much professed to be a citizen of the world, and if he called his son Arthur, it was because that name is written similarly in all languages. Arthur did allow, however, that the Germans stood supreme and apart from all other nations in metaphysical sensibility—a considerable concession from one who was himself a metaphysician. He disliked on principle, even patriotism; but he disliked German patriotism in particular, whether in its roman-

tic or realistic aspect. The Middle Ages, which the poets of the War of Liberation exploited to the profit of Germanism, seemed to him to be an odious period of senseless butchery, made more odious by the growth of chivalry towards woman. In some moods the grumbling philosopher was not less brutal towards the French. "Other parts of the world have monkeys, but Europe has Frenchmen, that is a compensation." He admired England politically, because there he found a sturdy individualism, a sentiment of *laissez faire* combined with a respect for the police; a respect based, he would have said, not on any foolish idealism of the State, but on common sense—a recognition that this world is eternally imperfect. *The Times*, which he perused every morning at breakfast, once recommended that the daughter of a baronet should be chastised for ill-treating a horse. Now, in Schopenhauer's system an act of pity was an affirmation of the principle, *Thou art that*, identical in essence with all that breathes; and it seemed to him that the English—in their care for animals—recognized, albeit unconsciously, the teachings of the Indian sages. By their acts the English proved themselves to be the most intelligent (enlightened) of peoples, though they were, of course, quite incapable of discerning the metaphysical truth from which their acts proceeded. (The admiration for English Tory tradition, combined in the case of an Anglo-Indian like Rudyard Kipling, with a feeling for the Hindu way of looking at life, might be noted in this connection.) When, however, *The Times* discoursed on the English sentiment of "fair play," "good form," and "sport," Schopenhauer grew restive, and spoke of "hypocrisy," the most odious of vices; England, too, was addicted to melancholy, our pessimist complained. He had in the end to turn

to the Spaniard, who united *sang-froid* with gaiety and passion, the countrymen of Cervantes, a pre-Schopenhauerian.

V.

Schopenhauer was a "conscientious objector." When a student in Berlin, he refused to fight for his country against Napoleon. Kindled by the exhortations of Fichte, the philosopher and patriot, all the dreamy youth of the University had armed for the war of liberty. Schopenhauer added to his offence by ridiculing this enthusiasm, and proceeded to compose his thesis: "On the Forefold Root of the Sufficient Reason." It is true that he justified himself by saying, first, that he had been born in a free city, and, secondly, that he was a man of genius, who could ill be spared; but these arguments did not add to his popularity. We do not find that he had any abstract objection to the employment of force; by his Will he left a little money to a society in Berlin which had been founded to combat the revolution of '48. He was certainly of opinion that other people should die that the philosopher might live. He always spoke contemptuously of physical

courage, "That virtue of the non-commissioned officer." Tolstoi repeated the phrase, but Tolstoi had a better right to disparage courage, for he undoubtedly possessed it.

His character emerges most clearly not from the metaphysical meditation on the "World as Will and Representation," but from his book of "Aphorisms on the Wise Conduct of Life." Social rank, political success, military renown, Court distinctions—all these things are dismissed as unworthy of desire.

"Let us seek rather for the glory which is the whole man, and such glory rather which a work of art sustains, not that which results from actions of note; the glory of the poets, and even above this the glory of the philosophers . . ." In preparing for himself a glory of this nature, says M. Ernest Seillière, his most recent biographer, the sufficiently but not superabundantly dowered son of the Dantzic merchant, the man who concentrated the effort of his long life on the patient elaboration of a work of incalculable significance—esteemed that he had procured for himself a greater sum of happiness than any other human being had ever enjoyed."

J. M. HONE.
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